

An End to the Concept of Mental Retardation:

Oh, What a Beautiful Mourning.

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If you could only know me for who I am
 Instead of for who I am not,
There would be so much more to see
 'cause there's so much more that I've got.

So long as you see me as mentally retarded,
 Which supposedly means something, I guess,
There is nothing that you or I could ever do
 To make me a human success.

Someday you'll know that tests aren't built
 To let me stand next to you.
By the way you test me, all they can do
 Is make me look bad through and through.

And someday soon I'll get my chance,
 When some of you finally adapt.
You'll be delighted to know that though I'm MR,
 I'm not at all handicapped.

AN ALTERNATIVE DEFINITION OF MENTAL RETARDATION

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- I. Current accepted Definition: Mental retardation refers to significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior, and manifested during the developmental period (American Association on Mental Deficiency, 1973).
- II. Assumptions implicit in old definition:
 1. Retardation is a general phenomenon.
 2. Intelligence, as defined by tests, is permanent; or
 3. that defined intelligence is sufficiently general to describe all functioning and imply potential.
 4. Adaptive behavior includes both spontaneous adaptation and trained adaptation.
 5. There is such a thing as the developmental period for all people.
 6. It is meaningful to catalogue individuals according to their tested intelligence and tested adaptive level.
 7. Retardation is most meaningfully conceptualized as a phenomenon existing within the individual rather than the context in which he exists.
- III. New definition: Mental retardation refers to a level of functioning which requires from society significantly above average training procedures and superior assets in adaptive behavior, manifested throughout life.
- IV. The mentally retarded person is characterized by the level of power needed in the training process required for him to learn, and not by limitations in what he can learn.
- V. The height of a retarded person's level of functioning is determined by the availability of training technology and the amount of resources society is willing to allocate and not by significant limitations in biological potential.
- VI. Assumptions underlying new definition:
 1. Mental retardation is normally not a general phenomenon.
Competence/deviance hypothesis
 2. Intelligence, as defined by tests, is a concept of little use.
 3. No behavior clearly defines potential. Prediction describes context.
 4. Adaptive behavior can be assumed.
 5. Development is lifelong.
 6. Train, don't test' (When evaluation ...)
 7. Mental retardation is most meaningfully conceptualized as a phenomenon existing within the society which can only be observed through the depressed performance of some of the individuals in that society.

SOME GOOD NEWS ABOUT MENTAL RETARDATION*

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What's the difference between a person who is five years old for one year and someone who is five years old for many years? Do they think the same? Do they act the same? Should we expect the same behavior from both?

When someone is labeled mentally retarded, and diagnosed as performing at the mental level of, say, a five year old, the tendency is to expect him to perform like a five year old. Let's change that expectancy. What do you suppose a normal five year old could do if he could stay five for more than just one year? A lot more than he does. And if he happened to be large for his age, say 5'8", a lot more than that. Rather than my presenting examples here, you take some very specific activities related to the morning routine, travelling to and from work, or work itself and ask yourself these questions. Which activities require intelligence? Which ones require training but not much intelligence? Which ones require both intelligence and training? Upon close inspection you will find that most activities which we assume require intelligence do not. Activities such as basic cooking, housework, bench assembly work, and auto parts disassembly are good examples. They require training. Intelligence is required to organize the activities and to do the training, but the actual tasks themselves can be performed without requiring much intelligence.

There are several reasons why we continue to think of most tasks as requiring intelligence. One reason is that we like to think of ourselves as intelligent, doing intelligent things. We have been conditioned to think this way, so, for no real reason, it is uncomfortable to find out that we spend much of our time doing what any five year old could be trained to do.

Another reason is the expectancy cycle we have created. For a century now, those of us working with the retarded have described their limitations. We worked with the retarded, operating with these expectancies and "proved" we were right. Sure enough, they did only as much as we said they would. We taught our successors these limiting expectancies, and they in turn proved that we were right.' Since us normal folks can do things the retarded cannot do we have assumed that those things must require intelligence, therefore the retarded cannot be expected to do them. And the cycle goes on.

A third reason is the need to maintain the status quo. As long as we can keep six million people out of the mainstream of society by saying they do not have what it takes, we not only avoid having to make room for them, we provide a lot of other people with work, taking care of the retarded and keeping them out of the mainstream.

* Used as a newspaper article

Now comes the good news. We have been wrong. The retarded can do things that we thought they could not. Profoundly retarded individuals, the lowest level of retardation, are being toilet trained, moderately and severely retarded individuals (most Mongoloid individuals are in this group) are using public transportation, doing complex assembly work worth well over the minimum wage (\$.), and working in competitive employment. In our research at Children's Research Center on the University of Illinois campus, for example, a group of 64 moderately and severely retarded adolescents from sheltered workshops for the handicapped, located throughout Illinois, all learned to assemble 15-piece and 24-piece bicycle brake, accurately and consistently. The average time required to learn each task was just over two hours. After learning the tasks, twenty of these individuals, working individually, assembled the 15-piece (Bendix) brake, one hour per day for 10 days. The average production for the 200 hours was 25 brakes per hour per person. The error rate was six percent. Research in progress includes studying the relationship between the difficulty to the task and poor work behavior, and a program to train retarded individuals to assemble electronic circuit boards. As efficient training procedures are developed, we hope the retarded will be given a chance at other than the most menial, low-level work.

The instructional technology used in the studies mentioned is certainly an important recent development. But more important is the break we have made in the expectancy cycle. As society, parents and professionals become increasingly aware of the kinds of accomplishments described above, they will change their expectancies, expose the inappropriate ideas about intelligence and give the retarded their inherent right for full participation in society.

The Relationship Between Power and Efficiency in Task Analysis

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When doing a Task Analysis there is a relationship between power, efficiency and the learner.

Power is defined here as the amount of intervention, assistance or direction required by the trainer in order for the learner to reach criterion. Power is what strategies and procedures the trainer must utilize in order for the learner to acquire the task.

The more power, the less efficiency. The more efficiency the less power. The more "capable" the learner, the less power needed. Since capability should be predetermined in only a broad sense, the trainer should have a hierarchy of procedures in the process task analysis. That is, a procedure to start with for the majority of the more capable learners (e.g., verbal directions). For those who need more power, a different procedure which relies less on the capabilities of the learner (e.g., a demonstration of the task). And, if it is probable that some of the learners will need more power, then the trainer should have several increasingly powerful procedures in the process task analysis (e.g., modeling, direct manipulation of the learner's hands, etc.).

Efficiency is defined here in terms of time. The less time it takes the trainer to "let the learner know" what he is to do, the more efficient the process. And the less planning needed, the more efficient the process. As used here, efficiency is not directly related to acquisition or criterion. That is where power comes in.

The goal is the procedure which has the most efficiency and sufficient power to bring the learner to criterion.

RESOURCES

Dr. Marc W. Gold
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51 Gerty Drive
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217:333-8285

(Send for reading list; call for quick assistance; come to use our extensive files)

Film Productions of Indianapolis
128 East 36th Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46205
317:924-5163

FILMS:

1. Try Another Way (available now) (Cost \$275; Rental \$50)
2. Task Analysis Overview (available March 1976) (Cost and rental fees not yet determined)
3. Content Task Analysis (available March 1976) (Cost and rental fees not yet determined)

(Contact Film Productions for detailed information)

AAESPH
Box 15287
Seattle, Washington. 98115

(American Association for the Education of the Severely/Profoundly Handicapped)
Monthly bulletins; many useful materials; good source for other resources.

Marc Gold Conferences:

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, September 23-25, 1975
Lansing, Michigan, November 3-5, 1975
Atlanta, Georgia, December 3-5, 1975
Pascagoula, Mississippi, January 7-9, 1976
Toronto, Ontario, January 27-29, 1976
Los Angeles, California, February 24-26, 1976
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, April 27-29, 1976
Halifax, Nova Scotia, May 11-13, 1976
Des Moines, Iowa, June 23-25, 1976
Syracuse, New York, September 15-17, 1976 (Date & City tentative)
Nashville, Tennessee, November 16-18, 1976 (Tentative)